



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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*'The future role of the NATO and EU in the
South Eastern Europe - Slovenia's perspective'*

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues and Friends,

Let me first congratulate the organizers (Marshall Center and German Federal Foreign Ministry) for hosting this important seminar. I would also like to express my thanks for the opportunity to be among the panelists today.

Our discussions are focused on South Eastern Europe and on the Western Balkans in particular, which in spite of all its progress still remains a potential European hot spot. For Slovenia, both a European Union and NATO member, as well as a neighboring country to the region it is important to deal with this issue and to contribute to the resolution of the remaining problems and to the region's Euro-Atlantic future.

The most important driving forces of this process are the activities of the international community on the one hand and the interest of the countries concerned to become an integral part of Euro-Atlantic integrations on the other. Opposed to this are backward looking, especially nationalistic parties who ride on historical myths, political disappointments and extremely low social and economic conditions in which the majority of their populations live.

As I see it, the most important characteristic of the current processes in the Western Balkans is the fact that the countries share similar challenges, namely ethnic problems, historical burdens of mutual conflicts and deep mistrust, resulting in a very low level of preparedness for cooperation. Some of their structures intertwine: Republika Srpska and Serbia, the Croat Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, relations between Serbia and Montenegro, the issue of Kosovo and strong Albanian communities in Macedonia and Montenegro.

The international community has been dealing in too much of a piecemeal fashion with this region, instead of adopting a common approach, at the same time recognizing and dealing with the differences in each single country.

We are all aware that this year is of crucial importance for the future development of the countries concerned. It is high time for the international community to adopt a comprehensive strategy for the Western Balkans, based on our common values and giving the region a Euro-Atlantic perspective. The international organizations, subscribing to such strategy, should clearly divide their labor and coordinate their activities in the region. We should at all cost avoid not just duplication but above all competition. Each organization has a role to play in advancing the goal of a democratic, stable and economically prosperous region.

The countries of the region should be encouraged to perform their individual reforms; at the same time these should be tackled on a single basis and as a structurally connected package.

I believe very much that the EU and NATO with their tools could and should do more, combining their activities and focusing on various parts of the reform process. This has to be combined with the NGO expertise. I like a term that has propped up in the NATO debate: while so far the countries of the region have been provided with “road maps” to guide them along to their goal, the region now needs more of a “GPS navigation” that would be more precise and would clearly warn the countries when they have veered off the right direction. As far as NATO is concerned, perhaps we have reached the time when an enhanced Membership Action Plan is needed. The existing one was invented for Central European countries and it does not always satisfy the peculiarities of the Western Balkans.

As far as the European Union is concerned, both the EU and particularly the countries of the region must work towards ensuring a smooth path towards reaching their goal, with as few twists as possible. We wish the countries to join the EU as responsible members, able to identify with and work in compliance with the values that are generally accepted in the Union.

Therefore it is of utmost importance to be aware that the Euro-Atlantic perspective provides the central incentive and motivation for Western Balkan countries in the transformation of their political, economic, security, defense and other systems. This represents the key element in resolving outstanding political, economic and other, particularly social issues, and consequently the decisive factor in the stabilization of the situation in the region.

The pursuing of this ambition cannot and should not be only a project of the political elites of the region, of course. The inhabitants of these countries should be well informed of the benefits and the responsibilities resulting from it. Such incentives will stimulate a faster and more efficient implementation of reforms. It is their choice, after all.

Slovenia will hold the EU Presidency in the first half of 2008. One of our four priorities will be “Enlargement and relations with the EU neighborhood”. In this process, the basic guidelines of our Presidency will encompass the preservation of a realistic European perspective for candidate countries and other countries on the path towards European integration, as well as adherence to agreements and obligations entered into by the Union.

As the presiding country Slovenia will continue the negotiation process with Croatia and Turkey, whereby it will take into account the commitments undertaken within the EU and try to make progress in negotiations with both countries. As in all rounds of enlargement thus far, progress will, of course,

depend on the candidates themselves and their meeting the required criteria. There will be no shortcuts and no backdoors.

As regards the drawing closer to the EU of other Western Balkan countries, it is not possible to speak of any precise dates. In the process of approaching the Union, Macedonia has made most progress since it filed its application for membership in March 2004. With regard to cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro Slovenia will strive for the conclusion of respective Stabilization and Association Agreements. These agreements provide the framework for economic and political cooperation between the EU and Western Balkan countries within the Stabilization and Association Process.

Slovenia intends to apply its principles and conceptual priorities, and realize the inherited agenda for the Western Balkans and SEE through the foreseen and established communication channels within the Union. However, in the light of future developments between Serbia and Montenegro (possible separation) and the Kosovo situation, we should be ready to develop separate dossiers for our new partners in this part of Europe (e.g. Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo).

Slovenia is ready to assist those countries also through its newly established Centre for the EU Integration Support (new name Center for a European perspective). The main purpose of the Center is to play an active role in promoting European integration processes in the EU candidate countries and potential candidates for the EU membership as well as the ENP (European Neighborhood Policy) countries. It will provide the conceptual and tactical support and finance assistance to governmental and private institutions in the partner countries and will organize training seminars and workshops. It will be officially opened on May 23, 2006.

With regard to NATO membership, Slovenia is also strongly committed to the open-door policy of the alliance. After all, we benefited from it a few years ago.

However, there should be no automatic membership granting (no free lunches). NATO is a performance-based alliance of nations that will only invite those aspirants that are not only willing to join but also capable of carrying the burden of membership. And Slovenia has found out very concretely that there is such a burden to be shared among the allies.

This year's summit in Riga, three years before NATO's 60th anniversary, will be a transformational summit. The 26 member countries will be heavily occupied with a number of issues concerning transformation. We have studied carefully the progress of the aspirant countries Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, and we see there is room for further improvement. Although each country should be judged on its own merits, I do not believe it would be useful for the region to separate them at this point in their accession process. We want more not less stability. Let us avoid premature moves and study carefully the eventual issuing of invitations at the 2008 Summit.

This year, and I believe also in the run up to the 2008 summit, we will also be tackling NATO's partnerships. And, speaking of the Western Balkans, Slovenia will want that special attention be paid to those remaining pieces of the jigsaw puzzle that still haven't attained the PfP/EAPC status with the Alliance.

Their progress towards the Alliance is closely connected with the progress of the three aspirants. We should do everything in our power to help bring not only Albania, Croatia and Macedonia, but also Serbia, with Kosovo, and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina closer to the Alliance, probably with different speeds and at different stages, but as part of a joint process. Such an approach would clearly demonstrate our interest to include everybody and leave nobody out of the process, giving the aspirants something to feel encouraged about and to provide further motivation to continue reforms.

During its 2008 EU Presidency, Slovenia will endeavor to further strengthen the European defense capabilities and to continue the development of the ESDP. We will also continue and try to enhance the cooperation with other international organizations in crisis management, placing well-regulated and transparent cooperation between the Union and NATO at the centre of its activities in this sphere. The possible new role of the EU in Kosovo as far as the ESDP and civil crisis management are concerned, could be a good example of this.

We are satisfied that three years after the Thessaloniki EU-Western Balkans Summit (we need to remain committed to its conclusions further on), we may talk about a more stable region; this is largely due to the Euro-Atlantic perspective. The latter represents the main incentive for the countries of the region on their path through reform process.

Dear colleagues,

Let me try to conclude my contribution with a few possible suggestions how to continue the development process in the Western Balkans, having in mind the ambition to further integrate it in the Euro-Atlantic Community.

Firstly, I would say, that on a general level the international community should proceed as follows:

- Formulate a common strategy and divide labor and coordinate activities. There are too many various, sometimes also similar if not conflicting activities going on at the same time in the region concerned. This would make the activities more efficient and would, above all, reduce the duplication of all possible resources. Both organizations should search for new, more result-oriented tools.
- Ensure closer and better coordination between the Union and NATO on the spot. This means not only upgrading coordination on the senior political level in the headquarters, but above all on the ground. It has to be

the coordination between these two organizations that will pave the way for others to follow.

- Both organizations have to push for stronger complementary effect of security management in the Western Balkans. The activities of NATO, the EU, the OSCE, the CoE, the UN and various NGOs have to focus more on different parts of the process, according to their tools and capabilities and not on all parts of the process. Only this will produce more effect.

Secondly, it is my strong belief that the countries concerned should also:

- Continue and upgrade all the activities regarding their membership ambition. This is a demanding, advanced and structurally complex process, which should be the ownership of all political elites and societies as such.
- Share experiences and upgrade cooperation among them. Cooperation, consensus building and solidarity are the fundamental values and the most important driving forces of the process.
- Be more prepared to absorb experiences from new NATO and EU members. Slovenia and other new members know for sure how extraordinary important this is.

Needless to say, we are prepared to transfer our expertise and know how, and are already heavily engaged in this process. It has brought some important results so far and I am sure we can do even better.

I wish you all a lot of successful work today and thank you for your attention.